

# Spirituality, Universal Love and Mindful Consumption: An Examination of Consumption Practices of Sri Lankan Consumer

## Activists

Wickramasekara, ES<sup>1</sup>

Lakshika, VGP<sup>2</sup>

Jayawickrama, JWD<sup>3</sup>

[eshwik@gmail.com](mailto:eshwik@gmail.com), [pavani@sjp.ac.lk](mailto:pavani@sjp.ac.lk), [dushan@sjp.ac.lk](mailto:dushan@sjp.ac.lk)

<sup>1,2, & 3</sup> University of Sri Jayewardenepura

### Introduction.

Overconsumption, driven by materialism results in many environmental and social problems. The challenge of overconsumption can be addressed, by instilling mindful consumption which is truly driven by human values such as 'spirituality' and 'universal love'. Unsustainable consumption (or environmentally unfriendly consumption) emphasizes the need for change towards the wellbeing of future generations (Sharma, 2014). Thus, the sustainability agenda can be effectively pursued with sustainable consumption practices among consumers at the individual level (Sheth, 2011). To meet the challenge of overconsumption at individual level, both behavior and mindset of individuals need to change, which can be achieved by instilling 'mindful consumption' (Sheth, 2011).

Scholars have explored unique practices of mindful consumption such as buying less, refusing and eschewing products and service that they do not need, downsizing, going vegan to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (Bowling, 2017) and shifting away from individual ownership of a consumer good to collectivity and sharing, buying second-hand, buying eco-friendly or green products, buying local products and practicing zero waste (Gleba, 2018).

### Problem Statement.

Such 'anti-materialistic consumption practices are initiated by various types of consume activists and anti-consumption movements (Forno, 2014). Consumer activists, as a changing force in any society, adopt different mindful consumption practices, it is not clear in the current literature how universal love and spirituality are reflected in their consumption practices.

## **Research Questions.**

RQ1: How do Sri Lankan consumer activists perceive Overconsumption?

RQ2: What are the Mindful Consumption Practices adopted by the Sri Lankan consumer activists?

RQ3: How are the notions of 'universal love' and 'spirituality' reflected in consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists?

## **Research Objectives**

RO1: To explore how Sri Lankan consumer activists perceive Overconsumption.

RO2: To explore the Mindful Consumption Practices adopted by the Sri Lankan consumer activists.

RO3: To explore the notions of 'universal love' and 'spirituality' reflected in consumption practices of Sri Lankan consumer activists.

## **Literature Review.**

Mindful consumption is theorized on consciousness in thought and action about consequences of consumption. Mindful consumption also supposes that one is in a position to choose what and how much one consumes (Sheth, 2011). The idea of Spirit is that what gives vitality or life to any system. To all living beings, plants, animals and to humans, literally to all biological systems (Ulluwishewa, 2016) thus, Spirituality is indeed the state of being one with the spirit or developing ourselves into who we really are. Which is also the only purpose of our lives as human beings. Spirituality desires all living beings to be content, healthy, peaceful and prosperous which is its love. Its love spreads to all living beings equally since it does not have any specific attachments or aversions to anyone which is universal love (Ulluwishewa, 2018). Thus, a spiritual human who shares universal love for all living beings tends to consume mindfully because their happiness is driven by hard wired kindness and love which will eliminate the consequences of overconsumption.

The Consumer Activists function with the prime goal of changing the principles, practices, and policies of organizations, businesses, industries, and governments. The movement's activists publicly portray their goal, themselves, and their adversary (Meulenberg, 2003) making the exploration of their perceptions of Overconsumption, their mindful consumption practices along with their reflections of the notions of 'universal love' and 'spirituality' vitally important.

### **Methodology.**

To unearth the matter by adopting a qualitative approach, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with consumer activists in Sri Lanka. This research adopted the snowballing sampling technique, which involves choosing several 'information-rich' respondents (Patton, 2002) and semi-structured interviews were employed for the data collection in this study. Interviews ran for more than 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the respondents. The study adopted the six-step data analysis method recommended by (Clarke, 2013) Thematic analysis was extremely valuable for the gathering of insights and in building up the relationship.

### **Findings.**

Findings showed that consumer activists perceive overconsumption as a waste and as a phenomenon everywhere along with the justification of means and the roots of overconsumption. The different mindful consumption practices adopted by them can be classified as Reducing, Reusing, Rejecting, Recycling and Redefining. Findings also showed that universal love and spirituality are reflected through respect, compassion, responsibility, religion, bond with the nature and through happiness.

### **Discussion and Conclusion.**

Overconsumption and the need of growing material wealth were treated unsuitable and as sources of environmental changes along with unhappiness by the respondents in general where some respondents remarked their mechanisms towards eliminating the environmental degradation through overconsumption with the application of technical solutions and by leading their followers. Most of the contemporary customers sleepwalk through a fog of impulses, habits, addictions, compulsions, and decision biases which were also recognized well by most of the respondents in the study.

Respondents marked the significance of mindful consumption while highlighting their practices such as Reusing, Reducing, Rejecting, Recycling and Redefining which were found common among all towards sustainability initiatives adopted by them. Within the recollections of their memories and stories it can be concluded that all their practices and the social movements they lead and engage in are driven by the inner changes took place with life's progressions while sharing universal love in different ways. (Ulluwishewa, 2016) highlighted the significance of spirituality along with the inner transformation from self-centeredness to selflessness by being kind to others which is proven well by all the respondents with the reflection of notions, 'universal love' and 'spirituality' in their consumption practices.

The insights of this study recommend organizations to change their way of thinking, most of their unsustainable business practice and the business goals requires actions that make a positive impact environmentally, socially and economically because most people follow these consumer activists' today towards a better sustainable world.

Further research could swell the research horizons by introducing a cross-cultural, worldwide, or demographical aspects into the research questions and given the exploratory nature of the study, it was significant to ensure the diversity of the sample of respondents. Future studies could also explore, the mindful practices of non-consumer Activists or the members who follow the leading consumer activists.

### **List of Reference.**

- Bowling, A. (2017). A Leading Cause of Everything: One Industry That Is Destroying Our Planet and Our Ability to Thrive on It. *Student Journals. Stanford Law School.*
- Clarke, V. &. ( 2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners.* London.
- Forno, F. &. (2014 ). Sustainable community movement organizations. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(2),139-157.
- Gleba, V. ( 2018). Changing Consumer Behavior Towards Mindful Consumption Through Social Proof to Decrease Environmental Harm.
- Meulenbergh, M. T. (2003). "Consument en burger". *Betekenis voor de markt van landbouwproducten en voedingsmiddelen. Tijdschrift Voor Sociaalwetenschappelijk Onderzoek van de Landbouw*, 18(1), 43–54.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sharma, M. &. (2014 ). Environmentally Sustainable Consumption: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. . *Global Journal of Finance and Management*, Retrieved from <http://www.ripublication.com>, 6(4), 367–374.

Sheth, J. N. (2011). Mindful consumption : a customer-centric approach to sustainability. 21–39.

Ulluwishewa. (2016). *Spirituality , Universal Love and Sustainable Behaviour : Handbook of Engaged Sustainability*,.

Ulluwishewa. (2018). *Spirituality , Universal Love and Sustainable Behaviour : Handbook of Engaged Sustainability*,.